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## Pastoral Letter from the Conference Minister

*by Rev. Kim Wood, Conference Minister*

Dear Beloved Southeast Conference and Friends,  
Grace and Peace to you in the name of Jesus the Messiah!

Palm Sunday is generally one of my favorite days of the annual Lenten journey toward Easter. But it also brings with it what some people would refer to as a “mixed bag” of thoughts and emotions. After all, the Celebration of the Palms offers but a glimpse of jubilation during a very conflicted and trying time – for all of Israel, for Jerusalem, for the Jewish people, for the Disciples, for Jesus. The atmosphere on that day of Jesus’ humble and triumphal entry into the city is electric. The common people are paving Jesus’ path with their outer garments and waving branches from nearby trees as they raise their voices in accompanying shouts of “Hosannah! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.” The city inhabitants are on edge as a crowd moves its way through their gates, threatening to disturb the order and status quo, maybe even the prosperity that is theirs. The Priests of the Temple and their secular counterparts in government leadership are diligently watching as they look for ways to remain in power and disband these heretics by eliminating their leader, who claims to be sent by God. Jesus’ message of equity, justice, unity, and love is just a little too menacing to their positions as the upper stratum, and they are having none of it. There is a pulsing, a throbbing, that will build during this week, and the way through is neither kind nor safe.



Each year, we find parallels between the Holy Week drama and our current

reality. But this year feels particularly reminiscent of those ancient days. Just as crowds, such as the crowd gathered around Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, risked being made an example of by Roman soldiers, who were trained to disband, or worse, to kill large groups in opposition to the Empire, people today fear militaristic training and police brutality for protesting injustices or speaking out on behalf of others. And reflective of the stance during biblical times that women's bodies were not their own, the recent revocation of Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court and state legislations banning abortion and controlling women's reproductive rights leaves women vulnerable and in harm's way.

In Jesus' time and ours, persecution of vulnerable populations for political and personal gain by people recklessly wielding power was and is common practice. Just as the Roman government targeted the Jewish people, passing laws against organizing and imposing high taxes to keep them in line, so, too, are powerful political and religious leaders today targeting our siblings who identify as transgender and non-binary by introducing and passing legislation criminalizing gender-affirming care. And, like the Jewish community of old, whose history made its way into the grand story of the Roman Empire only as much as it supported the dominant class's narrative, today, an unprecedented number of books are being banned and school curriculum scoured in an attempt to erase the history of slavery, discrimination, and LGBTQ+ lives and rewrite the tarnished tale of the American caste system.

Wealth and power meant everything in the thriving Roman Empire. If you had either or both, the possibility of getting what you wanted or needed was high. Today, as we respond to the many natural disasters that have left devastation throughout this nation, including deadly tornados and storms, flooding, hail, freezing temperatures, power outages, and contaminated water, the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" is glaring. Lower income areas, rural communities, and neighborhoods of, primarily, persons of color experience slower response times, lack of funding, and low availability of assistance and resources.

As we enter this holiest of weeks in the life of the Christian Church, we are in the midst of a season of great grief, despair, and oppression. The waves of human-made disasters of injustice, discrimination, and harm are rolling over us as quickly and with as much force as the natural disasters that have caused destruction, injury, and death in the five states of our Southeast Conference at an alarming rate.

And yet, there is hope on this Holy Week path. And there is God's promise that we are not alone as we walk with Jesus from "Hosanna" to "I find no

fault in him" to "Crucify him!" And there is redemptive energy at the foot of the cross and the opening to the tomb.

Palm Sunday does feel differently this year. The shadow of what lies ahead is very real. There is a lot of chaos swirling and fear brewing, a lot of uncertainty and desolation. There is good reason for concern. And there is necessity for awareness, advocacy, and action.

And so, I hold you all in my prayers. And I ask that you do the same for the Southeast Conference as, together in our diverse and beautiful way, we walk this path, Christ's path, yet again. May we find courage to come alongside those who are suffering and afraid. May we be a resource to others in the struggle for justice. May we find the space and grace to both listen and speak to one another with compassion and genuine love. And may we continue to find ways to come together to live by the standards of the One who walked this path before us and makes a way through to light, love, and compassion for all people.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Kimberly Wood  
Southeast Conference Minister

## News from the Conference Office

### From our Generosity Coordinator

*by Min. Carrole Moss*

Greetings and best wishes!! Hope your Lenten Season has been blessed as most of you prepare for Holy Week and celebrate the joy and blessings of the season.

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whom lives and reigns all. Amen.

We are grateful to all of you for your love and support. Love and blessings, as we CONTINUE TO JOURNEY,





## The Disaster Response Ministry Update

2023 has brought with it an onslaught of natural and human-made disasters in the Southeast Conference. Storms, including tornados and high winds, heavy rains, freezing temperatures, softball-sized hail, flooding, and wide-spread power outages have wreaked havoc on both rural and urban areas. In some communities, calamities have piled one on top of another, barely giving first responders time to help people to safety before the next wave hit. All five states in our conference (Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee) have been impacted. The death toll, especially from the most recent storm line that killed at least 32 people in the South and Midwest, has been high. We are currently working with the UCC National Disaster Response Ministries, VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Acting in Disasters) and/or Long Term Recovery Groups in each state, other UCC conferences, and local congregations and volunteer organizations to respond where assistance is needed.

Donations to assist with response and recovery in communities affected by these deadly storms can be made online at [SECUCC.org](https://secucc.org). Checks may be sent to the Southeast Conference at P.O. Box 1950, Decatur, GA 30031-1950. Please be sure to note when giving either electronically or by check that the donation is for Disaster Response and Recovery.< /p>

If you or members of your congregation are interested in volunteering at one of the storm sites, please contact Rev. Kim Wood at [kwood@secucc.org](mailto:kwood@secucc.org) for more information. Your name will be shared with area coordinators



working on in the community where you would like to help.< /p>

Please pray for the victims of these tragic events, their families, the communities impacted, and the first responders. Thank you for all the ways that you extend the care of the Southeast Conference to those in need.< /p>



*Photos: 1& 2: First Congregational; 3: Kirkwood UCC; 4: Rush Memorial*

## Cornerstone Fund Board Visits Southeast Conference

Conference Minister Rev. Kim Wood spent time with the UCC Cornerstone Fund Board of Directors on Friday, March 24, 2023 as they visited congregations in the Southeast Conference. The Board, which was in Atlanta to meet March 23-25, spent time with leadership from Kirkwood United Church of Christ, First Congregational Church Atlanta, and Rush Memorial Congregational Church. The group also visited to other non-UCC local churches in the area who are benefitting from the Cornerstone Fund program.

The United Church of Christ Cornerstone Fund is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission of "joining together in faith to invest in and build Community." Since 1993, the Cornerstone Fund, through the help of its investors, has supported more than 650 local United Church of Christ (UCC) congregations and other UCC-affiliated ministries and organizations with low-cost financing – totaling more than \$225 million. For more

information about The Cornerstone Fund, go to [cornerstonefund.org](https://cornerstonefund.org).

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## Installation of Rev. Joylynn Graham at Pleasant Hill Community Church

The Commission on Ministry of the Southeast Conference and Pleasant Hill Community Church invites you to the installation of Rev. Joylynn Graham at 2pm Central on May 7th at Pleasant Hill Community Church. All clergy are invited to wear robes and red stoles for the service.

Rev Joylynn Graham is originally from Missouri, but lived for many years in Colorado where she revived her degree in technology and worked in IT. She graduated from Eden Theological Seminary in 2014, and was called by Plymouth UCC in Dodgeville, Wisconsin where she served for 8 years. After the pandemic Rev. Graham wanted to be closer to her grandchildren who live in Knoxville, and that is how she found her way to Pleasant Hill.



Rev. Graham's hobbies include painting, hiking, and gardening, and she has two black labs named Jonah and Elijah who keep her forever moving and active.

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## Installation of Rev. Laura Robinson at Peace Church in Clemson

The Commission on Ministry and Peace Church invite you to the installation of Rev. Laura Robinson as pastor of Peace Church in Clemson on April 30, 2023 at 5pm at Peace Church. You are invited to join onsite or online ([you can join online here](#)). If you are going to participate onsite, please RSVP to [pastor@thepeacechurch.org](mailto:pastor@thepeacechurch.org). Ministers are invited to wear red stoles for the installation.

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## SECUCC Churches Team Visits Tuscaloosa

Members of the Southeast Conference Churches Team, a part of the Commission on Ministry, visited Tuscaloosa, Alabama on Saturday March 4, 2023. Chairperson Rev. Susannah Davis, Conference Moderator Rev. Richard Barham, and Conference Minister Rev. Kim Wood spent the day touring the city with Rev. Helene Loper. The group gathered for lunch and conversation with leaders from God's House, where Loper serves as pastor. God's House, a church that has served the Tuscaloosa community since 2002, has voted to become a legacy ministry and will be closing their doors later this year. The members have graciously discerned to invest the church's assets into a new UCC church start.

At its January 2023 meeting, the Southeast Conference Board of Directors voted to receive the gift designated by God's House for the purpose of starting a new church. The Churches Team has begun the process of moving forward with this exciting opportunity and will share information as the plan unfolds. What an amazing gift to bring a UCC presence to Tuscaloosa. Thank you, God's House, for your trust and partnership!

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## Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2023. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

### Week of April 2

- Open Table; Mobile, Alabama
- Susannah Davis
- Dorothea Lotze-Kola
- Matt Laney
- Stephen Sterner

### Week of April 9

- Open Community UCC; Atlanta, Georgia
- Emmanuel UCC; Greenville, South Carolina
- Kristen Barner
- Kirk Foster
- Ellen Sims
- Bennie Liggins

## Churches in Transition

First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Holy Trinity Community Church, Nashville TN; First United Church, Belvidere TN; Deer Lodge Congregational Church, Deer Lodge TN; Brookemeade Congregational, Nashville TN; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA; Sandy Creek, Lafayette AL; First Congregational Christian, Montgomery AL; Open Table UCC, Mobile AL; Safe Harbor Family Church, Clinton MS; Howard



Congregational, Nashville TN

## News from the Wider Church



### "Trans youth lives matter"

UCC leaders commit to love and justice in action amidst anti-LGBTQ bills.

## Trainings, Conferences & Events



## UCC Webinar—Getting Ready for Earth Sunday: Resources for Congregations

Many churches celebrate God's creation on the Sunday closest to Earth Day (April 22nd). To support congregations in making the most of this occasion, Creation Justice Ministries has created a resource that brings the lens of justice to food, the most immediate and tangible way that we connect with the natural world around us. In this webinar, Karyn Bigelow will introduce the resource and talk about specific ways churches can deliver a powerful message and experience on Earth Sunday. Even if you cannot make the webinar at its scheduled time on April 12, 2023 at 1 pm ET, still sign-up, and we will send you a link to a recording of it. [Register now!](#)



**Healthy Boundaries 301: Money, Sex, & Power**  
**April 28, 2023, 1:45 - 5:15 ET (Part 1)**  
**AND April 29, 2023, 8:45 am - 12:15 pm ET (Part 2)**  
**Both sessions required**  
*Register by April 19, 2023*

An advanced discussion of healthy boundaries for clergy and church leaders, designed for those who have completed Healthy Boundaries 101. This workshop builds on the basics and applies boundaries principles to specific situations with a particular emphasis on power dynamics, finances, sexual harassment, and pornography. Register and pay for this workshop [here](#). Please note: Healthy Boundaries 201 and Healthy Boundaries 301 can be taken in any order, as long as the participant has completed Healthy Boundaries 101 or an equivalent foundational workshop.

## Conference Calendar

April 4 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

April 6 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT

[Board of Directors Meeting](#)

April 11 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

April 18 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

April 20 @ 1:00 pm - 1:30 pm EDT

[Live Harp Meditations for Ministers](#)

April 20 @ 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm EDT

[Commission on Ministry Meeting](#)

April 25 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT

[Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers](#)

April 25 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

April 30 @ 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm EDT

[Installation of Rev. Laura Robinson at Peace Church in Clemson](#)



View the full calendar of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

## Contact Us

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